

Comic Reading—a Survey

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The hue and cry is being raised against comic reading. This is a serious concern of parents, teachers, librarians, authors and publishers. Children are being forbidden to read comics, which in turn promote their interest in them. The most serious objection to this type of literature is that this is more enjoyable and less educational. Frieldander states that the "function of reading is still not concerned with acquiring knowledge... but looks for gratification of the instinctual life."¹ Comics seem to supply this.

Horror comics are popular and also being produced in plenty. This, of course does not provide healthy reading matter due to excesses of excitement and violence.

"Familiarity with them destroys the child's natural abhorrence for cruelty and horror. Half of the crimes committed by juveniles are known to have been instigated by such comics."²

One of the distinguished authors of children's literature when interviewed said that we have to save children from the adverse effects of reading comics. Some of the libraries do not allow children to take comics for home reading.

Unhealthy literature leaves an unhealthy effect upon children. The publication of such literature should be discouraged and checked. But comic books should not be taken with cheap humour, it infact includes humour, adventure, fantasies, detective stories with crimes, murders and robberies, love appeal, also biographies of great men and women and pictorial stories from classics etc.

Lauretta Bender quotes a conversation with a young boy: "I like all the mystery comics because they tell what is true. I mean, Superman always gets the bad guy. I know it is fiction, of course, but it is the true way of things. This is what I like about it. I like the detective pictures because they always figure it out and catch the bad guys. I like crime pictures too, because the police always catch the criminals and take them to jail." "Sometimes the comics are not too convincing and suppose the criminals kill the police and get away". "Well there are plenty of police in the country and others will catch them and take them to jail somewhere some time." "But suppose in the comics they did not." "Then I would not read the comic."³

Such comics are not only enjoyable but educative also. The children like comics, being unaware of their advantages and disadvantages. They may hate crime, violence and criminals if authors want this reaction from their readers. Comics are now being written on every theme, from various subject areas.

Some of the comics being published in India have become very popular with all age groups. Parents and teachers feel they help cultivate the reading habit that will make children future readers. Moreover, introducing children to great classics through comics in abridged form motivates them to read the original at a later stage when they may get the opportunity. For purposeful comics with Indian settings, the main requirement is that authors and publishers should feel their responsibility toward children so that good comics are written and published.

The results of a survey of reading interests in comics among boys and girls in different age groups have been summarised in the following tables. This study was conducted by a random interviewing of children using libraries in Delhi, Lucknow,

Chandigarh, and Solan (Himachal Pradesh).

Age group below 9 years

The following table shows the reading preferences for comics:

Preference	Boys No.	(N=44) %	Girls No.	(N=44) %	Total No.	(N=88) %
First	30	68.18	16	36.36	46	52.27
Second	8	18.18	12	27.27	20	22.73
Third	—	—	—	—	—	—
Fourth	—	—	4	9.09	4	4.55

This table shows that 52.27 per cent of the students gave their first preference to comics. The percentage of the students giving second and fourth preferences to comics were 22.73 and 4.55 respectively. For more boys gave first preference to comics in this age group (68.18%) than

did girls (36.36%). The percentage of second preference given by girls and boys were 27.27 and 18.18% respectively.

Age group 9-11 years

The following table shows the reading preferences for comics:

Preference	Boys No.	(N=200) %	Girls No.	(N=72) %	Total No.	(N=272) %
First	48	24.00	14	19.44	62	22.79
Second	34	17.00	14	19.44	48	17.65
Third	24	12.00	10	13.88	34	12.50
Fourth	18	9.00	11	15.27	29	10.66
Fifth	8	4.00	8	11.11	16	5.88
Sixth	2	1.00	3	4.16	5	1.84
Seventh	4	2.00	—	—	4	1.47
Eighth	2	1.00	—	—	2	0.74

This table shows that the next older group gives much less importance to comics than the under-nine group-only 22.79% compared to 52.27%. Comparing boys' and girls' preferences showed no appreci-

able differences between the two.

Age group 12-14 years

The following table shows the reading preferences for comics among the 12-14 years old.

Preference	Boys No.	(N=136) %	Girls No.	(N=51) %	Total No.	(N=187) %
First	11	8.09	12	23.52	23	12.30
Second	23	16.91	9	17.64	32	17.11
Third	25	18.38	9	17.64	34	18.13
Fourth	21	15.44	—	21	21	11.23
Fifth	16	11.76	6	11.76	22	11.76
Sixth	7	5.15	—	—	7	3.74
Seventh	9	6.62	—	—	9	4.81
Eighth	2	1.47	2	5.88	4	2.14

The above table shows that 12.30 per cent of the children gave their first preference to comics. The percentages of the students giving second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth preferences to comics were 17.11, 18.13, 11.23, 11.76, 3.74, 6.41 and 1.05 respectively. The comparison of the percentages of the boys and the girls giving different preferences to comics showed that there were no marked differences in their preferences except in the case of first preference, whereas, in the 12—14 group comics appear to have still less importance than in the previous group — only 12.30 per cent of the children give comics as their first reading preference. Boys' and girls' preferences also show a reversal of the trend in the under-nine group: whereas over 68 percent of the under-nine boys preferred comics to other reading material, only 8 percent do in the 12—14 group. But 23.5 percent of the older girls give first preference to comics.

Conclusions

The study revealed that comic reading is the first priority among children except in the preschool group, who do not understand and the teenagers where they take more interest in adventures.

In view of the above findings only standard comics literature should be made available to children which may fulfill the recreational as well as educational functions. These need to be censored and evaluated before being made accessible to tender hearts and minds.

1. FRIEDLAENDER, K. Children's responses to frustration: A developmental study. *American Imago*. 3; 1942; p. 129-50. Quoted by WHITEHEAD (Frank) *et al.* Children and their Books. London, Macmillan, 1977, p. 209.
 2. Colby, Jean Poindexter. *Op. Cit.*
 3. BENDER, Lauretta. The Psychology of children's reading and the comics. *The Journal of Educational Sociology*. December, 1949, p. 227-228.
 4. DEVSARE, Hari Krishan. Ed. *Bal Sahitya: Rachna Aur Samiksha*. New Delhi, Shakun Prakashan, 1979, p. 141.
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